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U.S. Launches Investigation of the Mengele Case

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 6 — Attorney General William French Smith announced today that the Justice Department would open an investigation into the whereabouts of Josef Mengele and into reports that the Nazi war criminal had been held and freed in the American occupation zone of Vienna after World War II.

"There have been enough allegations to warrant our undertaking this investigation," Mr. Smith said. He declined to speculate on what action the United States could take on whatever it might learn about Dr. Mengele, the doctor at

the Auschwitz concentration camp.

Mr. Smith said the allegations prompting the investigation stemmed from newly declassified documents suggesting that Dr. Mengele "was in a United States-occupied area after the war and was known to United States authorities."

Other allegations to be examined, he said, concerned the possibility that Dr. Mengele had been in Canada and visited "even the United States itself." The last reported sightings of Dr. Mengele, who would now be 73, were in Paraguay in the 1970's.

Dr. Mengele, a major in the Nazi SS, was a physician at the Auschwitz-

Birkenau camp from May 1943 to January 1945. Four million prisoners, most of them Jews, were gassed and cremated there. According to West German arrest papers, he was accused of conducting grotesque medical experiments on prisoners, torturing them and killing them.

"The investigation will seek to compile all credible evidence on the current whereabouts of Mengele as well as information concerning his movements in occupied Germany and his suspected flight to South America," Mr. Smith said. "The investigation will also seek to determine the credibility of reports that Mengele has visited the United

States in the past."

"We intend to be thorough about it and also to have a speedy investigation," he added.

Mr. Smith said the inquiry would be conducted by the Justice Department's Office of Special Investigations, which was formed to prosecute war criminals who entered the United States illegally. He said the Pentagon and the Central Intelligence Agency were also offering assistance.

"The Israelis are intensely interested," Mr. Smith said in response to questions at a hastily called news conference. "They'll be working very closely with us."

The newly released American intelligence documents regarding Dr. Mengele were obtained under the Freedom of Information Act by the Simon Wies-

enthal Center, a Los Angeles-based institute for the documentation of Nazi crimes.

One of the documents was a letter dated April 26, 1947, from Ben J. M. Gorbey, a special agent of the United States Counter-Intelligence Corps in Germany, to the commanding officer of the 430th C.I.C. detachment in Vienna. It said that information had been received that Dr. Mengele was arrested in Vienna.

No response to the letter was found and the Wiesenthal Center said attempts to locate Mr. Gorbey through the Army failed.

Another document recently made public is a 1962 letter from an American Army official to a Canadian visa control officer in Cologne, West Ger-

many. The letter responded to a query concerning a "Joseph Menke" who evidently had applied for a Canadian visa in Buenos Aires. The American officer attached an Army intelligence report identifying Joseph Menke as Josef Mengele of Auschwitz.

The Army withheld some Canadian records on the ground of foreign-government confidentiality. But according to an official familiar with the case, they suggest that a man calling himself Mr. Menke entered Canada.

Rabbi Marvin Hier, dean of the Wiesenthal Center, reached in Paris, said today that he filed suit in Federal District Court in Washington last week to compel release of the remaining records. He said Senator Alphonse M. D'Amato, Republican of New York, had joined in the lawsuit.